

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1. (Currently Amended) A switching device for user data in the form of cells, the switching device comprising: [[-]]

a backplane;

a plurality of ingress means connected to an input side of the backplane, for transmitting data to said backplane;

a plurality of egress means connected to an output side of the backplane, for receiving data from said backplane;

for each ingress means, associated slicing means for converting cells into slices for transfer across the backplane;

for each egress means, associated de-slicing means for ~~reforming~~ re-forming the slices into cells; and

backplane control means for controlling the backplane in accordance with control slices which are interspersed with [[the]] slices containing user data;  
[[.]]

wherein the control slices are located in predetermined timeslots within a sequence of slices that are transferred across said backplane.

Claim 2. (Original) A device according to claim 1, wherein the control slices are spaced in time.

Claim 3. (Cancelled).

Claim 4. (New) The switching device according to claim 1, wherein each ingress means has a dedicated timeslot for sending control slice information to said backplane control means.

Claim 5. (New) The switching device according to claim 4, wherein dedicated timeslots for the respective ingress means do not overlap.

Claim 6. (New) A switching device for transmitting message data in the form of cells, said switching device comprising:

a plurality of ingress devices;

a plurality of egress devices;

a backplane connected to receive data from said ingress devices and transfer it to egress devices in accordance with control information; and

a backplane control device connected to said backplane, for receiving and generating control information for controlling the transfer of data from said ingress devices to said egress devices; wherein,

each of said ingress devices includes an associated slicing means for converting cells into slices for transfer across the backplane;

each of said egress devices includes an associated de-slicing means for re-forming said slices into cells;

said backplane control device controls timing and routing of slices across the backplane in a synchronous manner, according to control information; and

communication of control information between said ingress and egress devices, said backplane, and said backplane control device takes place across said backplane, via control slices which contain said control information and are interspersed within message data slices, as said message data slices are transferred across the backplane.

Claim 7. (New) The switching device according to claim 6, wherein said control slices are situated in predetermined time slots within a sequence of slices that are transferred across said backplane.

Claim 8. (New) The switching device according to claim 6, wherein each ingress devices has a dedicated timeslot for sending control slice information to said backplane control means.

Claim 9. (New) The switching device according to claim 8, wherein dedicated timeslots for the respective ingress devices do not overlap.